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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001763

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [BA](#) [OFFICIALS](#) [BILAT](#) [POL](#)
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES DOMESTIC, REGIONAL ISSUES
WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

Classified By: CDA Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) The Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid October 5 and discussed NDI, Bahraini elections, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting in Havana, friction between Jordan and Qatar, and the Ambassador's participation in a trade promotion trip in the U.S. On NDI, Shaikh Khalid said that Bahrain would participate in the proposed study tour in the Washington, DC area at the time of the mid-term elections. The political development institute was in the process of selecting participants. The Ambassador stressed the importance of allowing independent, preferably international, monitors to observe Bahrain's upcoming elections. Shaikh Khalid was certain the GOB would ensure the elections were transparent and properly observed. He said the NAM meeting was not helpful, calling Chavez and Ahmadi-Nejad "Barnum and Bailey." Shaikh Khalid explained that there had been friction between Jordan and Qatar over Jordan's late nomination of its UN ambassador to be UN secretary general. The Ambassador noted that he would visit

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four major U.S. cities to promote the U.S.-Bahrain free trade agreement (FTA). End Summary.

Bahrain To Participate In NDI Program

¶2. (C) In an October 5 meeting, Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa and the Ambassador discussed NDI's proposed study program coinciding with the U.S. mid-term elections, Bahrain's upcoming elections, the NAM meeting in Havana, friction between Jordan and Qatar, and the Ambassador's commercial mission in the U.S., among other issues. On NDI, the Ambassador asked about the status of Bahrain's reply to NDI's proposal to conduct a study mission in the Washington, DC area to coincide with the mid-term elections. NDI had requested a reply by September 30 but to date had heard nothing. Shaikh Khalid said that Bahrain Institute for Political Development (BIPD) Secretary General Lulwa Al Awadhi had sent a reply September 28 to NDI Regional Director Les Campbell welcoming the proposal and stating that BIPD was in the process of selecting participants. (Note: Campbell confirmed separately later the same day that he had just received Al Awadhi's letter.) Shaikh Khalid said it was positive that Bahrainis would participate in this program. He also drew attention to a sentence in Al Awadhi's letter stating, "it seems appropriate to have a legal framework for our future cooperation."

Yemen Supplants Bahrain as Democratic Model

¶3. (C) Turning to Bahrain's elections, the Ambassador said that USG officials continue to be unhappy about the NDI situation. In contrast, NDI, along with the EU and an Arab organization, observed Yemen's recent presidential election. The presence of international observers had attracted President Bush's attention, and he now cites Yemen as a good model in speeches. This in contrast with Bahrain, which formerly had been held up as a model.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador continued that it is very important that Bahrain's elections be free and fair, and be seen to be free and fair. The best way to do this is to get the observer piece right. Ideally, Bahrain should bring in international election monitors. At a minimum, there should be truly independent domestic monitors. Independent observers give credibility to elections and improve the perception that elections are legitimate. Shaikh Khalid said he was sure the GOB would take the right steps to ensure the elections are transparent and are properly observed. The Ambassador emphasized that this issue is important to the U.S.-Bahrain bilateral relationship.

¶5. (C) In a separate October 4 meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Shaikh Mohammed bin Mubarak Al Khalifa, the Ambassador made the same points about NDI and elections monitors. Shaikh Mohammed replied that Bahrain is fully committed to democracy and a democratic system. With the elections coming, Bahrain needs its friends to encourage democracy to continue to grow. There are some people who push so hard on democracy that "they can push the car right off the cliff." He said, however, that he understood the Ambassador's message and would convey it to King Hamad.

MANAMA 00001763 002 OF 002

Barnum and Bailey's Traveling Circus

¶6. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question, the Foreign Minister said the NAM conference in Havana was "not helpful," calling Venezuelan President Chavez and Iranian President Ahmadi-Nejad "Barnum and Bailey." Shaikh Khalid said that Chavez addressed his speech directly to Raul Castro, recounting all the nice things Fidel had said about Raul. Ahmadi-Nejad's speech "was not important."

¶7. (C) Shaikh Khalid explained that Jordan's last minute nomination of UN Ambassador Prince Zeid bin Raad Al Hussein to be UN secretary general had come as a surprise. Jordan put the nomination on the table at the same September Arab League (AL) ministerial meeting that (now former) Thai Deputy Prime Minister and UN SecGen candidate Surakiart attended and spoke at. Bahrain and other AL countries had been unhappy with Jordan's unexpected move. The Qatari representative said that the nomination came too late, and Jordan did not like his response. Jordan feels that Qatar campaigned on behalf of the Thai candidate. Shaikh Khalid said that a Jordanian official had asked him if there was consensus within the UN on a candidate. He said there was and recommended that Jordan not dwell on the matter any longer.

Trip to Promote FTA

¶8. (C) The Ambassador informed the Foreign Minister that he would depart soon for the United States to participate in a commercial tour to four major cities to promote the U.S.-Bahrain FTA. Shaikh Khalid said this was very useful and that Deputy PM Shaikh Mohammed had briefed King Hamad on the tour. Separately, in the October 4 meeting, Shaikh

Mohammed told the Ambassador that a lot of work needs to be done to educate Bahrainis about the FTA, saying there should be a focus on specific sectors that can benefit from the trade preferences. The Ambassador said he looked forward to briefing the GOB and Bahraini FTA Implementation Committee upon his return.

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